

What's That Noise?

NOISE CONTROL SAFETY ORDERS as adopted by the Division of Industrial Safety, State of California, recently became effective.

With the fundamental purpose of conserving employees' hearing, these orders establish minimum standards regarding control and exposure to excessive industrial noise.

Where reasonably possible, harmful exposure is to be reduced or eliminated by engineering or operational control. In other situations, approved personal protective equipment is to be used. Such equipment, which is to be supplied and maintained by the employer, is to be worn when noise equals or exceeds the specified limits. The employer must also instruct the employee in the use of ear protectors and must designate where within the place of employment they are to be worn. It is the employee's responsibility to properly use and care for such equipment.

The minimum standards for noise are:

<i>Decibels</i>	<i>Frequency bands (cycles per second)</i>
110	20-75
102	75-150
97	150-300
95	300-10,000

These levels apply when an employee is exposed to such noise for five hours or more per normal workday. For each halving of exposure time, the noise level may be 3 decibels higher (for example, if exposure time is two and a half hours, above decibel figures may be increased by 3 decibels.)

Since physiological response to noise may vary, these standards may not prevent hearing loss due to noise in every individual, but it is believed they should keep exposure to noise within reasonably safe limits.

Physicians who may have contact with noise problems should be cognizant of these new standards and their application.

We feel the Division of Industrial Safety is to be commended for its scientific and rational approach in developing these safety orders, which will be of considerable assistance in the conservation of hearing of the employees in industries where noise may be a hazard.

COMMITTEE ON OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH
CALIFORNIA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION